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ABSTRACT

It has been theorized that feminist movements have failed because they focused on legal and political reforms and ignored the influence of domestic roles. Five hundred thirty persons completed a 125-item questionnaire which generated "desire for change" scores on two scales: (1) sex roles "in the home" and (2) sex roles "out of the home." A significant desire for change was found both "in the home" and "out of the home" in nearly all demographic categories. However, desire for change "out of the home" significantly exceeded desire for change "in the home" in almost all groups. It is concluded that the current feminist movement can be given a prognosis of guarded optimism in terms of theoretical predictions. (Author)

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# Today's Feminist: Her Place is in the Home!

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Today's Feminist: Her Place is in the Home!

With public attention focused on the 200th anniversary of the United States (1976), International Women's Year (1975), and passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, it seems appropriate to consider the future of the current feminist movement in light of its history in this country.

Early feminist thinkers emerged soon after the founding of the country and reasoned that the rights accorded to men under the Constitution should likewise be accorded to women (Adams, 1776). The feminist movement in the early and mid-1800's focused on and achieved some educational, legal, and property reforms (O'Neill, 1969, p. 14).

The Civil War underscored the failure of the United States to guarantee equal status to all people and generated renewed efforts aimed at attaining equal rights for women. When feminist activity resumed in the post-Civil War period, organizational efforts were focused primarily on suffrage -- a right previously denied women (O'Neill, 1969, p. 52). There were at least a few feminist thinkers in the post-Civil War period who took exception to the belief that the remedy for women's inequality was to be found in legal and political reform. Bullard, in a feminist periodical of the time, wrote:

> But woman's chief discontent is not with her political, but with her social and particularly her marital bondage. The solemn and profound question of marriage...is of more vital consequence to woman's welfare, reaches down to a deeper depth in woman's heart, and more thoroughly constitutes the core of the woman's movement, than any such superficial and fragmentary question as woman's suffrage. (1870)

At the organizational level, such a view was unpopular. As O'Neill reports: "Alone of the major women's groups in this period, the NWSA (National Woman Suffrage Association) admitted, however fitfully, that the heart of the woman question was domestic and not legal or political; that woman's place in the family system was the source from which her other inequities derived" (1969, p. 21).

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, feminists were still generally devoted to the Victorian concept of womanhood which revered home and family. These feminists wanted "equality" but did not see the achievement of equality as involving any changes in the structure of domestic life (O'Neill, 1969, p. 30).

The feminist movement, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist in the United States after suffrage was attained in

1920 (O'Neill, 1969, p. 293). Contrary to the expectations of the suffragists, attaining the vote had not significantly changed the status of women. O'Neill (p. 293) expresses the view that in the post-suffrage era women did not significantly influence politics, not did politics play a vital role in shaping women's lives. Rather, social and intellectual changes in society, e.g., those later to be labelled the "Feminine Mystique", were determining the roles of women.

Historian O'Neill concludes that past feminist movements have failed in their attempts to attain equality for women because their efforts were devoted almost entirely to legal and political reform. Earlier movements ignored, for the most part, what he considers to be the real source of women's inequality: her domestic roles and expectations. He argues, "... it was a mistake for Victorian feminists to abandon their critique of marriage...because it seems evident that the institutions of marriage and the family as presently conceived are among the chief obstacles to feminine equality" (O'Neill, 1969, p. viii).

Interest in equality for women re-emerged in the 1960's, and by the early 1970's had attained the status of a feminist movement. If O'Neill is correct in his analysis of the reason for failure of previous feminist movements, then we

can expect that the current movement will also fail, unless there is some reason to believe that change will occur in domestic areas, i.e., unless there is now a willingness to alter the Victorian assumption that woman's primary reason for existence is to be a housekeeper, wife, and mother and therefore that domestic tasks (such as housekeeping and childrearing) are solely the responsibility of women.

The present study examines current attitudes toward cultural sex role prescriptions. More specifically, this study examines separately and compares attitudes which relate to re-assigning sex roles both in the home and outside the home. The study measures:

(1) The extent to which a variety of demographic groups express a desire for change in sex roles in these two general areas.

(2) The difference between desire for change in the home and desire for change outside the home, as a function of demographic factors.

## Method

### Subjects

The sample consisted of 530 people from a variety of urban, suburban, and rural areas most of whom lived in Illinois at the time they participated in the research. Refer

to Table 1 for complete demographic data. Subjects participated in the study on a voluntary and anonymous basis.

Instrument

The instrument was a questionnaire developed by the authors. It included 125 items and measured attitudes toward sex roles in our society. Item content reflected a wide range of issues of concern in recent research literature and public political/social controversy. Items required subjects to respond on a 5-point scale ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement. The instrument also included 28 demographical items, of which 9 were used for analysis in the present study: age, sex, race, religion, college curriculum, year in college, marital status, number of children, and socioeconomic status.

For pusposes of developing the questionnaire, attitude items were assigned on the basis of content to one of two general scales which were designated "In the Home" and "Out of the Home". "In the Home" items were also assigned on the basis of content to one of 3 more specific scales: Housework (allocation of household responsibilities). Childrearing (allocation of childrearing responsibilities and communication of sex role expectations to children) or Marital Relationship (decision-making and control issues). "Out of the Home" items

were assigned to one of 5 specific scales on the basis of content, Vocational-Educational (career choice and employment practices), Legal (sex differentials in legal matters), Social (expectations regarding social behavior), Divorce (property, alimony and child support settlements), and Stereotypes (traditional assumptions regarding sex-related traits). The questionnaire was then administered to a pilot sample (N=213), and intercorrelations were obtained for all items. For pusposes of statistical analysis of the total sample, an item was retained in one of the general or specific scales only if it correlated significantly with all other items on that scale.

## Results

### Attitude Toward Change in Sex Roles

In order to test whether the attitude scores indicated desire for change, t tests were run on the difference between each demographic group mean and a neutral value of 3.0. Scores significantly higher than 3.0 indicated desire for change; scores significantly lower than 3.0 indicated opposition to change.

With few exceptions, people in all demographic categories were in favor of change on all attitude scales. A total of 373 out of 420 t tests were significantly in favor of change. Of these, 307 were at the .001 level of confidence,

36 were at the .01 level, and 30 were at the .05 level. Table 1 shows mean scores for all demographic categories on the general "Out of Home" and "In the Home" scales. Of the 84 t tests on these scales, 77 were significantly in favor of change. Non-significant means (N=6) are indicated "NS". Significant opposition to change (N=1) is indicated "SO".

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Insert Table 1 about here

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The following demographic groups did not significantly favor change "In the Home": persons over 60 years of age; persons who identified themselves racially as Negro; persons who classified their religion as "other": persons who classified themselves as Upper Lower class socioeconomically; college students enrolled in a Business Administration curriculum. College students enrolled in an Engineering curriculum did not significantly favor change "Out of the Home" and were significantly opposed to change "In the Home".

Utilizing scores on specific scales to look more closely at those demographic groups which did not significantly favor "In the Home" change, it was found that change was not significantly endorsed as follows: Marital Relations (by all of the groups who did not favor general "In the Home" change), Child-

rearing (by Negroes, persons subscribing to "other" religions, and Upper Lower class persons), and Housework (by persons over 60, "other" religions, and Engineering students).[1]

Comparisons of "In the Home" and "Out of the Home" Attitudes Within Demographic Categories

T tests for correlated means were calculated for each demographic category to determine whether desire for change was more pronounced for "In the Home" or "Out of the Home" items. Results and levels of significance are shown in Table 1.

In almost all (80 out of 84) demographic categories, subjects were significantly more in favor of changes "Out of the Home" than in favor of changes "In the Home". Exceptions were in the following categories, where there was no significant difference in "Out of the Home" vs. "In the Home" attitudes: graduate students, people who classified themselves as socioeconomically Lower Class, and people having 3 or more children. None of the demographic categories significantly favored "In the Home" changes over "Out of the Home" changes.

T tests between independent means were used to determine which demographic categories showed the most desire for change on "In the Home" subscores. The following differences

(means can be found in Table 1) were found to be significant at the .05 level of confidence: Persons in the 23-30 and 31-45 age groups were significantly more in favor of change than were younger or older age groups. Females were significantly more in favor of change than were males. Caucasians were significantly more in favor of change than were Negroes. All religious affiliations were significantly more in favor of change than was "other" (this group presumably includes Eastern and non-traditional Western religious sects).

College students in Engineering and Business Administration were significantly less in favor of change than were all other categories of college students. For subjects enrolled in college, mean "desire for change" scores increased as a function of number of years in college, with Juniors, Seniors, and Graduate Students favoring change to a significantly greater extent than Freshmen.

## Discussion

These findings indicate that people representing a broad spectrum of demographic characteristics are currently willing to endorse sex role changes that are contrary to traditional sex role expectations -- both "In the Home" and "Out of the Home". In terms of O'Neill's historical analysis, this data suggests the possibility of social change which would result in a greater degree of equality between women and men.

It must be remembered, of course, that what people agree to in principle may be quite different from what they would be willing to put into practice.

Comparisons of "desire for change in the home" with "desire for change outside the home" reveal that domestic change is still not considered as important as change in educational, occupational and legal areas. Subjects in nearly all demographic categories were significantly less inclined to endorse changes in traditional sex roles in the domestic setting as compared to their willingness to agree with such changes outside of the home. Data from demographic subcategories and specific scales provide some indication of where willingness for and resistance to change exists, both in terms of population segments and in terms of specific aspects of domestic behavior. While it is encouraging, in terms of O'Neill's theory, to find that people are endorsing the reallocation of domestic responsibilities, it is not quite so encouraging to find that less concern is expressed for domestic changes than for non-domestic changes.

As reflected in the attitudes of our questionnaire respondents, it appears that people in general are willing to endorse the idea of "equality" for women, but do not seem to feel that changes in the home are as essential to this idea as changes outside the home. Despite the fact that current

feminists are concerned with change in domestic roles as well as change outside the home, and despite the fact that this concern is manifest at both organizational (e.g., N.O.W.'s Committee on Child Care) and individual (e.g., focus of consciousness-raising groups) levels, it would seem that the current feminist movement is in some danger of replaying the events of the 1920's. Concern with passage of the ERA is certainly reminiscent of earlier feminist concern with suffrage. A parellel could be drawn between current interest in the ERA and the sequence of events prior to passage of the 14th Amendment. In both instances it would appear that resistance to the effort at passing legislation resulted in the channeling of increased energies and resources into assuring passage of the legislation. Although it is not the intent of the authors to imply that ERA is unimportant, it is suggested that the value of any piece of legislation be kept in perspective. While reforms in legal areas are necessary in order to attain equality in non-domestic areas, it must be remembered that feminists in the 1920's proclaimed the winning of the vote to represent the final victory for women. Passage of ERA is no more a "final victory" than suffrage. In terms of O'Neill's analysis and the present data, the authors conclude that feminists and feminist organizations must focus continued and renewed energies on generating attitude change in regard to domestic roles and expectations.

## References

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Bullard, L. What flag shall we fly? Revolution, October 27, 1870, p. 120.

O'Neill, W. L. Everyone was brave: A history of feminism in America. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971.

## Footnotes

[1]Appendix A, containing the complete table of means and standard deviations is available from the authors upon request. Address inquiries to M.J. Luetgert, Student Counseling Service, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, Box 4348, Chicago, Illinois 60680.

Table 1

"Out of Home"/"In the Home" Change Scores and Comparisons for all Demographic Subcategories

| | "Out of Home" | | | "In the Home" | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | M | S.D. | M | S.D. | DIFF | t |
| **Age** | | | | | | | |
| 22 | 343 | 3.72 | .58 | 3.40 | .72 | .32 | 12.38*** |
| 23-30 | 93 | 3.81 | .59 | 3.64 | .72 | .17 | 3.41*** |
| 31-45 | 50 | 3.91 | .57 | 3.68 | .68 | .23 | 3.55*** |
| 46-60 | 10---- | Dropped from Analysis due to Insufficient N-------- | | | | | |
| 61+ | 15 | 3.51 | .32 | 3.24(NS) | .55 | .27 | 2.69* |
| **Sex** | | | | | | | |
| Female | 334 | 3.86 | .54 | 3.62 | .64 | .24 | 10.24*** |
| Male | 181 | 3.51 | .60 | 3.16 | .76 | .35 | 9.32*** |
| **Race** | | | | | | | |
| Caucasian | 410 | 3.82 | .57 | 3.56 | .72 | .26 | 11.02*** |
| Negro | 78 | 3.47 | .45 | 3.09(NS) | .54 | .38 | 9.26*** |
| Oriental | 5 ---- | Dropped from Analysis due to Insufficient N ------ | | | | | |
| American Indian | 4 ---- | Dropped from Analysis due to Insufficient N ------ | | | | | |
| Other | 18---- | Dropped from Analysis due to Insufficient N ------ | | | | | |
| **Religion** | | | | | | | |
| Atheist/Agnostic | 22 | 3.91 | .59 | 3.62 | .75 | .29 | 2.67* |
| Catholic | 190 | 3.74 | .54 | 3.53 | .73 | .21 | 5.98*** |
| Jewish | 36 | 4.07 | .56 | 3.71 | .67 | .36 | 4.77*** |
| Protestant | 177 | 3.75 | .55 | 3.43 | .68 | .32 | 9.40*** |
| None | 26 | 3.83 | .61 | 3.62 | .64 | .21 | 2.37* |
| Other | 68 | 3.43 | .64 | 3.06(NS) | .69 | .37 | 6.41*** |
| **S.E.S.** | | | | | | | |
| Lower | 17 | 3.56 | .30 | 3.49 | .71 | .07 | .53 |
| Upper Lower | 26 | 3.49 | .58 | 3.20(NS) | .69 | .29 | 3.15** |
| Lower Middle | 89 | 3.70 | .62 | 3.47 | .80 | .23 | 4.07*** |
| Middle Middle | 241 | 3.80 | .55 | 3.50 | .69 | .30 | 10.16*** |
| Upper Middle | 119 | 3.79 | .61 | 3.49 | .72 | .30 | 6.77*** |
| Upper | 9 ---- | Dropped from Analysis due to Insufficient N ------ | | | | | |
| **College** (if enrolled in degree program) | | | | | | | |
| Does Not Apply | 142 | 3.75 | .57 | 3.57 | .72 | .18 | 4.48*** |
| Fine Arts | 23 | 3.77 | .65 | 3.49 | .66 | .28 | 2.84** |
| LAS-Natural Science | 26 | 3.75 | .55 | 3.55 | .61 | .20 | 2.42* |
| LAS-Social Science | 81 | 3.82 | .57 | 3.65 | .64 | .17 | 3.51*** |
| LAS-Humanities | 16 | 3.80 | .56 | 3.50 | .60 | .30 | 15.00*** |
| Engineering | 13 | 3.09(NS) | .68 | 2.57(SO) | .49 | .52 | 12.00*** |
| Education | 118 | 3.82 | .54 | 3.51 | .71 | .31 | 7.14*** |
| Business Adm. | 35 | 3.40 | .50 | 2.89(NS) | .68 | .51 | 34.00*** |
| Other | 56 | 3.77 | .56 | 3.36 | .76 | .41 | 6.05*** |
| **Year in School** | | | | | | | |
| Not a student | 91 | 3.80 | .57 | 3.63 | .60 | .17 | 3.89*** |
| H.S. | 3---- | Dropped from Analysis due to Insufficient N ------ | | | | | |
| Coll. Freshman | 223 | 3.66 | .53 | 3.32 | .70 | .34 | 10.94*** |
| Coll. Sophomore | 79 | 3.68 | .51 | 3.38 | .64 | .30 | 6.24*** |
| Coll. Junior | 57 | 3.83 | .78 | 3.54 | .81 | .29 | 3.86*** |
| Coll. Senior | 40 | 3.91 | .62 | 3.69 | .63 | .22 | 3.11** |
| Special | 7----- | Dropped from Analysis due to Insufficient N ------ | | | | | |
| Graduate | 18 | 3.84 | .48 | 3.70 | .74 | .14 | 1.17 |
| **Marital Status** | | | | | | | |
| Single | 360 | 3.75 | .58 | 3.43 | .73 | .32 | 12.53*** |
| Married | 128 | 3.77 | .61 | 3.58 | .73 | .19 | 4.40*** |
| Divorced | 13 | 3.87 | .54 | 3.49 | .64 | .39 | 3.16** |
| Widowed | 8---- | Dropped from Analysis due to Insufficient N ------ | | | | | |
| Separated | 4---- | Dropped from Analysis due to Insufficient N ------ | | | | | |
| **Children** | | | | | | | |
| None | 326 | 3.76 | .59 | 3.49 | .73 | .27 | 10.04*** |
| One | 39 | 3.73 | .59 | 3.48 | .69 | .25 | 3.33** |
| Two | 41 | 3.80 | .56 | 3.53 | .69 | .27 | 3.73*** |
| Three | 24 | 3.68 | .59 | 3.58 | .63 | .10 | 1.11 |
| Four or more | 25 | 3.54 | .60 | 3.35 | .71 | .19 | 1.96 |